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White Trash Cherub

Ashley Maxwell

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WHITE TRASH CHERUB

by

ASHLEY MAXWELL

Under the Direction of Christina West

ABSTRACT

White Trash Cherub is a romanticized exploration of my autobiographical memory spanning a three-year period of my early childhood when I grew up in a poor, uneducated, and abusive environment. This current work serves as a transitional passage between some of those memories and the metamorphosed perspective I now carry as an adult while simultaneously reflecting on the beauty of being human even though an individual's circumstances may not be so.

INDEX WORDS: Autobiographical memory, Rococo, Sculpting, Female figure, Romantic art

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ASHLEY MAXWELL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

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2014

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to Benjamin Tabor.

“Fortune and love favor the brave.”-Ovid

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“Childhood- a temporary state- becomes an emblem for our anxieties about the passing of time, the destruction of historical formations, of conversely, a vehicle for our hopes for the future. The innocent child is caught somewhere over the rainbow-between nostalgia and utopian optimism, between the past and the future.” Chris Jenks, *Childhood*¹

PREFACE

Coming to Atlanta was secretly a scary thing for me. A big portion of my childhood was spent in a small town about an hour west of here and that Podunk town held many unpleasant memories; to me it represented everything I never wanted to be. I still have a lot of family there and it isn't family I've never met. No, it's family that I've been close to my entire life—family that consists of a great grandmother, some of my favorite cousins, an uncle, two sisters, a brother and my only niece. I was terrified that I would be expected to visit and therefore be flooded with old memories- ones I would rather not remember- and be faced with all that discomfort that surfaces when nostalgia grabs hold of the reins and sends you on a roller-coaster ride. And if anything about me is tried and true, it is my defense mechanism. If any manic person or situation hints at tipping my scale off balance, I quickly become emotionally detached. If I went to that small town, it meant I'd have to acknowledge dysfunction and years of abuse ~~and~~ that most definitely were scale tippers! So naturally I became distant and made my excuses for not visiting good ole' Cedartown, Georgia. I will say that in almost three years, the only time I've ever been back to Cedartown was on my terms and it wasn't to visit family, but to gather inspirational materials for this very thesis. With that being said, I must back track to set the stage for this body of work titled, *White Trash Cherub*.

¹ Kate Douglas, *Contesting Childhood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 1.

It is hard for me to recall exactly why I decided to come to graduate school. I know it probably had something to do with getting a degree that allowed me to teach and, of course, to be able to create work, experiment and to find a voice. What I now realize as it comes to an end, is this journey has allowed me to find my true voice, not just any voice. Through experimentation and critique I've been pushed to be true to myself and embrace what I'm naturally inclined to want to create—to work backwards in order to understand why and then have insight and the ability to work from concept all the way through to fabrication.

It is an understatement to say that I have met an array of very interesting people here in Atlanta and I can say that all of them, in one way or another, have directly influenced this newest body of work. But Sarah in particular has truly made me step outside my comfort zone by encouraging me to examine my self as a source for inspiration, no matter how uncomfortable and gritty it may be. To examine it, deal with it, create from it and move on. Over many bowls of cheese dip and pitchers of margaritas my dear friends, Sarah, Kelly and myself have spent countless hours pondering life, art, and sharing personal histories that makeup who we are today. Through constant conversations I've learned how to be open with the past and not just store it in the back of my memory and avoid it. I've realized that it is a part of me and that I don't have to do everything in my power to put miles between my current self and my child self. Instead, it can be harnessed as a creative influence in my artistic practice. I've always felt that people end up where they need to be for whatever serendipitous reasons and it is clear to me now why it was important for me to come to Atlanta, for I have come full circle and it has never felt so right and honest to be making the work I'm making.

THESIS STATEMENT

The way people remember their childhood experiences varies from person to person. How we subconsciously group together certain memories from a period of time gives insight to the awareness of oneself during that era of our life and provides information about who you were, are, and can be in the future.

Using clay, found objects, and common construction materials such as concrete, plaster, and foam as a vehicle, I explore my childhood through specific *autobiographical memories*. My sculptures serve as transitional passages between specific memories and the metamorphosed perspective I now carry as an adult. I have recently started revisiting locations associated with specific childhood memories. From these places, I use landmarks and trigger objects associated with the memory as a way to inform and conjure imaginative landscapes. The landscapes are purposely rendered in a dreamy way to disguise the harshness of my youth. By exploring these autobiographical memories I am able to reflect on who I was and how those circumstances have helped define who I am today.

My figures are sculpted at an intimate scale, with stylized bodies that reference the classical tradition of figuration. This stylization supports with the way I romanticize the actions and characters within my memories, creating picturesque scenes that, in the end, are a combination of the authentic and fantastical. With titles such as, *Dumpster Beat Down* and *N-Word Lover* paired with the show title, *White Trash Cherub*, I create an intentional juxtaposition between the given titles and what is actually physically presented to the viewer. It is my intention to challenge viewers, to make them question how they perceive and choose to handle adversity. The goal is for my sculptures to create a tranquil and contemplative platform that

allows the audience to experience a feeling of comfort and reflect on the beauty of being human, while recognizing that an individual's circumstances may not always be so.



Figure 1. Ashley Maxwell. Gallery shot of *White Trash Cherub*.

INTRODUCTION TO AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

The term *autobiographical memory* is an umbrella concept that overarches the roots of my work. The exact definition of autobiographical memory is broad and is extensive in its breakdown once one starts examining the many psychological levels associated with the term. In short, autobiographical memory is defined as, “A memory system consisting of episodes recollected from an individual's life, based on a combination of episodic (personal experiences and specific objects, people and events experienced at a particular time and place) and semantic (general knowledge and facts about the world) memory.”² In a nutshell, autobiographical

² H. L. Williams, M. A. Conway, and G. Cohen, *Autobiographical Memory, Memory in the Real World* (Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 2010), 21-90.

memory relates to things we remember during the course of our lifetime and can be broken down into what is known as the *autobiographical knowledge base*, which contains knowledge of the self and provides information of what the self is, was, and what we can be. So ultimately, a person's sense of who she is stems from the memories she has of her life. Autobiographical memory and how it functions is the backbone of my thesis and the pages that follow attest to some semblance of the term in connection to the physical work.

Trigger Objects

Trigger objects are objects from a person's past that when seen, cause one to remember the memory associated with the object or the general time frame when the object was important.³ Trigger objects embedded within the landscapes for this body of work are either actual objects from my childhood or objects that are similar to the ones I had during that time. The use of objects within my sculptures is a way for me to link the past with the present representation of the memory. It is also employed as a way to bring viewers back from the realm of fantasy and to make them question the relationship between the surreal and the familiar object. An important trigger object within the show was actual dirt collected from the trailer park, the location where the memories that inspired the *White Trash Cherub* work originally occurred. That specific dirt not only bridges the gap between fantasy and reality, but also allows-me to physically represent the location of these events in the work. It is a way for me to materialize Maplewood, the trailer park in a gallery setting.

³ Sarah Steinvorth, Suzan Corkin, Eric Halgren, "Ecphory of Autobiographical Memories: An fMRI Study of Recent and Remote Memory Retrieval," *NeuroImage Elsevier*, Retrieved January 1 2014, <http://web.mit.edu/bnl/pdf/Steinvorth,%20in%20press.pdf>.



Figure 2. Ashley Maxwell. Example of trigger object. Childs play kitchen and real pots embedded in landscape. Detail of *Blood Sisters*.

Autobiography and Narrative

Autobiographical narrative tells the story of an experience that took place in the author's life. It usually focuses on the details associated with the experience, but it also lets the author express his or her thoughts and feelings about what happened.⁴ Through my research I found that there are a plethora of autobiographical text narrations of childhood experiences that, more often than not, depict traumatic childhoods that are characterized by abuse, poverty, discrimination and struggles with identity. My sculptural works are just another viewpoint, another voice and representation to add to this ever-growing genre. *White Trash Cherub* allowed me to explore my child self and share with others a portion of what makes me who I am.

⁴ Holt, Rinehart and Winston, "Autobiographical Narrative," *Model Bank*, Retrieved December 20 2013, <http://go.hrw.com/eolang/modbank/mguide/mg111-1.htm>.

With this work, I'm depicting the climax moment of a particular autobiographical narrative. I'm not telling my story from beginning to end; rather I'm choosing to represent a particular facet of my childhood during the age range of 6 to 8. I have narrowed it down to represent specific characters and memories that give insight to the fonder times of my childhood, while also shedding light on the underlying circumstances of a more traumatic upbringing that stemmed from abuse and poverty.

SETTING THE STAGE

My mother up and left my birth father somewhere around the time I was four. I remember this age because I have a memory of racing my father around the interior courtyard of the apartments where we lived in Jacksonville, Florida. After the race, I leaned against the front door jamb, expressing disdain about having to go to kindergarten soon, and vowing that I was never ever going to school. The next memory I can recall is cloudy, but I can remember helping my mother put shoes on my baby brother, James. That scene fades into being on a big Greyhound bus, and is foggy up to the point of sitting in a McDonalds with my mother and James. James was in a highchair and my mother was feeding him when she saw a Ford Bronco leaving the parking lot. I remember seeing it too; it was getting ready to pull out when my mother yelled for me to stay with James. Now I'm not sure if it is happenstance or if it was planned, but my pawpaw and mawmaw were the ones in the Bronco and I can only assume that this memory of quickly placing shoes on my brother and getting into that Bronco is of us leaving my birth father and returning to extended family in Georgia. This memory is important because it marks the turning point in my life and the effects of it are what ultimately led to events that are catalysts for the work in *White Trash Cherub*.

Now my mother, Mitzi, was raised by a single divorced mom who wasn't financially well off but wasn't trashy either. My mother and those with whom she associated herself, on the other hand, were. When she married my stepdad, Sam, all logic in her brain must have been completely gone. Mitzi fell into the sad category of bad decisions resulting from low self-confidence. She lacked self worth and no doubt was codependent. Mitzi wasn't a bad person-she didn't drink or do drugs. She wasn't very educated, but the woman was a hard worker and was easy to get along with and everyone always loved her. She just didn't have a back bone when it came to Sam and really, in retrospect, it's hard to blame her; he tried to kill her, James and myself many times, threatened it more often than not and always accompanied the threats with beatings and torturous acts if he ever feared she was going to leave. I guess sometimes it's just easier to stay than go.

It is important to reveal this because it sets the stage. It gives a small fraction of insight to the backstory and conditions I was exposed to as a child and is important to the thesis work on a personal level. What I'm presenting as the first installment of this work isn't the retelling of the physical abuse and inner workings of a disastrous family unit, but rather, I'm presenting the fonder memories I have of my two girlfriends and myself and some of the shenanigans we got into during this particular span of time—a time that I often refer to as my white trash days.

INTRODUCTION TO PEOPLE AND LOCATION

Cedartown, Georgia. The setting is Maplewood, a trailer park that is plopped down on the edge of town. Also known as home for roughly three years during a pivotal turning point of my life. It had to have been the first few days of moving to the trailer park when I remember my mom, her girlfriend and I standing in the girlfriend's kitchen. I can't recall the woman's name,

but she had given me a bunch of pots and pans that she was throwing out so that I could go play house. Somewhere along the way I found an old rotting rope just lying around so I added it to the arsenal and a plan came to fruition. I can recall reciting my plan with quite some sass to the lady; I was going to tie all these pots together in an intricate trap around the root system of the only tree in her little sliver of a backyard. The woman then properly warned me about two trouble- making rug rats who stole, fought, bullied and ran wild in the trailer park and who would, no doubt, steal my pans. I specifically remember stating with confidence that those girls weren't going to get past my knots and trickery and with a Crayon- scribbled note of warning. I was 100 percent convinced that those loose cannons were absolutely NOT going to steal my pots. Well, you can bet those girls sure enough stole all my pots and didn't even leave me the rope as some sort of warped atonement for their actions. This was my first introduction to "the sisters" Nicole and Christina Bullington who were to be my future best friends.



Figure 3: Ashley Maxwell, 2014 photo of the root system pots were tied to

Now I don't know when the three of us became best friends, but somewhere along the line it happened. Nicole was my age, and Christina was a grade or two ahead of us, but the three of us ran wild—barefoot troublemakers whose parents were never around or cared to teach us any better. “If you can't beat them, join them” so the old saying goes.

A LITTLE MORE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I was no older than six when I was fully in charge of James, Samantha, and my new baby sister, Amanda. I can remember school days when I relied on my biological clock to get James and myself up, dressed, and to the bus stop for school, and summer days when I babysat all day. I made ten bucks a week during the summer and I would save my money up so that I could buy a few new school clothes and school supplies at the local Family Dollar. I didn't mind buying my own supplies because it would mean that I got to pick what I wanted and didn't have to go with the cheapest option. Honestly, it was a good lesson in saving. Nonetheless, I always felt like a mini-mother, charged with feeding, cleaning and getting my siblings to bed without any adult supervision. When it came to cooking, I would have to pull the kitchen chair to the stove. I remember patting out hamburgers and cooking them in Crisco. I even knew not to put the grease down the sink and would save it in a can for future use. I have no idea how I didn't burn the trailer park down. Looking back, there was definitely a duality to my childhood. I was a domesticated child, taking on the role of a grown woman on one hand and completely innocent and inexperienced in the lessons and boundaries of life on the other.

If I were to reflect on all my memories during my “white trash days” in search of what I would consider the epitome of my loss of childhood innocence, it would be what transpired the first time I figured out my stepdad stored his porn above the washer and dryer in the bathroom. The washer and dryer symbolizes for me the starting point of my sexuality and

really sets the tone for what life was like through my eyes during the time when it should have been untainted.

Nicole, Christina, and I used to scale up the front of the appliances and share all the interesting positions we found in the magazines. To this day I can still remember some of the sex scenes depicted in the photographs. And honestly, it didn't stop at the three of us huddled around magazines in the bathroom. We would invite the other kids from the trailer park over, sit them in the living room and bring out the collection of VHS tapes, plopping them into the VCR and taking turns fast forwarding to our favorite parts. Eventually we were rotating to the other kids' trailers to see what their parents' porn stashes had to offer. We played strip spin the bottle and I even remember getting busted by my second grade teacher, Ms. Adkins, for passing a note to a friend that was informing her that Christina had supposedly had sex in a closet with a boy!

To say we were highly sexualized at an early age is an understatement. And it is important for this work that I depict traces of that sexuality throughout the entire show. These traces sometimes appear as poses of fully developed women reenacting the actions of children, or sometimes in the pairing of these fully developed women with toys that I possessed as a child. As I stated previously, the washer and dryer is a symbolic representation and anchoring symbol for sexual presence during my youth.

The washer and dryer physically make an appearance as the focal point in my show, serving as the foundation for the scene of *N-word Lover*. No matter how fast we were forced to grow up, we were still so innocent and oblivious to the social workings of the world. We hadn't been taught much about what was right or wrong, so, often as kids do, we acted without any consideration of what our words meant and how hurtful or negative they were, or what impact they could have had on others. We were testing our boundaries and dealing with

adult concepts and unknown histories, but through the eyes of inexperienced juveniles naïve to the rest of the world.

The following story falls into the category of autobiographical memory that is known as an *analogous event*. Analogous events are something that happened in the past that dictates future behaviors.⁵ I can say without a doubt that this had an outcome that set the tone for a life long lesson and quickly put in perspective that there was a whole lot out in the big ole world I didn't understand, but just because I couldn't comprehend it didn't mean I could go around loose tongued. I want to note before going further that for this thesis paper I've chosen to dissect one sculpture and the story that accompanies it. All other pieces from *White Trash Cherub* have a similar infrastructure as *N-Word Lover*, though their specific stories will not be discussed here.

N-WORD LOVER, THE STORY

Just beyond the boarder of the trailer park, distinguished by a slope peppered with pines, sat an old rugged house surrounded by old beat up cars, trucks and layers of mud. The couple that resided in that little house was an interracial couple- a black older man and a white older woman. Now, in the first grade I had little boyfriend named Jamie and he was black, so when Nicole, Christina and I stood on the back steps of my parents trailer and screamed over and over to the couple below, "N-word lover" (insert the actual word) at the top of our lungs, it is a testament to the fact we didn't, or at least I didn't, understand the significance of the word. Nor did we understand the consequences of using it. That man definitely made it a mission to see to it that even if I was clueless, I would remember it was a word I never wanted to breathe again. It was commendable on his part, but was a hard lesson to learn on mine.

⁵ Explorable.com, "Autobiographical Memory," *Explorable.com*. Retrieved December 21 2013, <http://explorable.com/autobiographical-memory>.

He waited until my parents were home and I can still remember the sinking feeling in my stomach when I saw him pull up in his truck and step into our yard and proceed to inform my step dad of what Nicole, Christina, and I had done earlier in the day. I also remember him insisting I get my butt tore up for it. Since Sam never needed a reason to give a beating in the first place, he most certainly obliged. He took his leather belt off right then and there and didn't just whip me, he beat the b'jesus out of me, metal buckle end first! I can only imagine how bad the man must have felt because the only reason Sam stopped when he did was because the man insisted that he do so.

This is the defining moment in my life that made me aware of how hurtful words could be and I believe this is also the time I became aware that there was a difference between "your mama is so fat" jokes and derogatory name calling. Referring to someone by a racial slur wasn't a joke or a laughing matter and it had serious repercussions; all my bruises were proof of that. This memory was important for me to reference as part of this show because it demonstrates a pivotal moment in my life that aided in defining my character and helped develop an understanding, appreciation, and tolerance of others who were different than me.

INFLUENCES

Romantic Art

The vast majority of my work is influenced by the notion of Romantic Art. Throughout the centuries, the understanding of the word 'Romantic' has continuously grown to signify more than just the idea of romantic love and my interest in Romantic Art goes beyond chivalrous acts often solely associated with the word. Researching the period extensively allowed me to understand the mindset of these artists and characteristics associated with the movement and why it is truly important to me and my work.

Initially the term ‘Romantic’ was equated with the old tales of chivalry, but as early as the mid 1600’s it was being associated with aspects of the imagination.⁶ The significance of ‘Romantic’ continued grow and around 1710, “ tales of imagination and sensibility and the scenes and landscapes described in them were being taken more seriously, and the term ‘Romantic’, applied to them, and came to signify ‘imaginative’, ‘interesting’, ‘exotic’, ‘unusual’ or beautiful’.” Romanticism, as an artistic movement, was birthed out of the politically turbulent background of the French Revolution, Napoleonic Wars, and the American Revolution, when times were filled with war, strife, and all around uncertainty.⁷ Romantics attempted to rediscover a past Utopia in juxtaposition to these ugly times. Today, a simple search to define Romanticism describes it as an emphasis on the imagination and emotions and the use of autobiographical material with an appreciation of external nature and interest in the remote.⁸

With *White Trash Cherub* I aim to explore and depict my memories from the same perspective as the romantics that came before me. I see a parallel between my work and the work of the Romantic era that had an opposition to grit and countered it with imagined peace, beauty, and the picturesque as a means of escaping the real world. I admire their decision to take on a more optimistic view of the life around them than choosing to paint their work as the darkness that it was.

William-Adolphe Bouguereau, My Romantic Inspiration

William-Adolphe Bouguereau was a French painter during the Nineteenth century. Bouguereau is known for his mythological themes and idealized world that mostly captured

⁶ Raymond Lister, *British Romantic Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8.

⁷ Raymond Lister, *British Romantic Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15.

⁸ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/romanticism>

bathers, nymphs and shepherdesses. The vast majority of his paintings had a large emphasis on the female figure.⁹ Three paintings that I intensely draw inspiration from are: *The Nymphaeum* (1878), *The Oreads* (1902), and *Nymphs and Satyr* (1873).

⁹ Fronia E. Wissman. *Bouguereau* (Rohnert Park: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996), 10.



Figure 4. William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *The Oreads*



Figure 5. William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *The Nymphaeum*



Figure 6. William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Nymphs and Satyr*

When it comes to inspiration for my work, I'm interested in the elegant poses and groupings of the figures more than the mythology that Bouguereau captures in his depictions. In *The Nymphaeum* and *The Oreads*, the nymphs are depicted as passive and beautifully posed, mostly lackadaisical, unaware and frozen in some sort of flowing slow motion, and stretched-out positions. There is something alluring and almost musical about the scenes. They are in action but not necessarily taking on an active role. I feel as if Bouguereau's figures create a dialogue amongst themselves, though there are with no words spoken. I like to compare it to the way musical scores create emotionally charged dialogue but words have no place amongst them. What I admire about *Nymphs and Satyr* is the active role of attaining a goal. The Nymphs have caught a peeping Satyr and intend to dunk him in the waters in which they bathe. There is pushing, pulling, bending and running captured within this painting and I am constantly striving, little by little, to incorporate similar active roles for my ladies. When rendering the female nude, I use the sensual positioning and robust softness found in Bouguereau's style.

Rococo Influence

Much of my inspiration is also derived from the Rococo sculptures of the 1700's. Ultimately what I enjoy about the Rococo style is its elegance and beauty.

When discussing the role of Rococo and the significance of the stylistic sculptures of that period and how it transfers to my work, I best like the description by Gauvin Bailey, "Adopting the dramatics, gesture and illusionistic perspective of the stage, they seek to engage and employ the human passions, from the mystical and ecstatic to the violent and erotic. They also favor action over stasis, so that sculptures no longer stand placidly within their niches but reach into

the area beyond.”¹⁰ The idea of capturing a dramatic single moment like a snapshot is something that I’m constantly considering.

Clodion, My Rococo Inspiration

My favorite and most influential sculptor from the Rococo period is Claude Michel, known simply as, Clodion. Clodion is best known for his small Rococo styled terracotta sculptures of nymphs and satyrs. His work is amazingly rendered in the round and I am in awe of his ability to capture movement through the medium of clay. In fact, there is one pose that I’ve used as direct reference to his sculptures. It can be found in *N-word Lover* and will be discussed in the next section.

¹⁰ Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Baroque & Rococo* (London: Phaidon Press Inc., 2012), 4.



Figure 7. Clodion, *Female Satyr with Putti*

N-WORD LOVER, THE SCULPTURE

By borrowing visuals and ideas from the above pool, intertwining them with autobiographical memory, and actualizing them with modern materials, I can represent my

romanticized sculptures in a contemporary way. This can be seen with the introduction of the washer and dryer set as I felt it was appropriate to use the washer and dryer as the understructure for the romanticized portrayal of *N-Word Lover* due to its symbolic representation of the instability of my childhood, its link to sex and “adult things,” and how my view of the world was through a distorted filter. *N-word Lover* is the first example of me having real world awareness of sexual preferences; sex and fetishes no longer just lived in the magazines and on TV screens, they were a part of actuality. I reference this further by embedding clippings from early 90s porn magazines as the foundation of the landscapes that are slowly overgrowing my trigger objects.

It is important to mention that in the sculpture I decided to omit any male presence. It was not only an aesthetic decision, but also a conceptual choice. I didn't want to open a conversation about male and female hierarchies or have too much deliberation of the male presence, as I felt it could potentially lean that way, given the ratio between the two sexes. Instead, I chose to represent them as ghost characters. The females that require interaction with men are seemingly interacting with the air. This can be seen in the representation of the white woman who was the lover of the black man. I have her straddling a rock form that resembles a lap with spread legs. In fact, this pose is based on one seen in Clodion's, *Satyr and Nymph*, in which a nymph is draped lovingly between the legs of a satyr.



Figure 8. Clodion, *Satyr and Nymph*



Figure 9. Ashley Maxwell. Detail of figure in *N-Word Lover*

I'm drawn to the pose of this female because it isn't your typical frontal view of a figure. Instead it is of her backside and its softness, with her elegant, sweeping motion projecting love or sexual attraction towards a lover. For this reason, I chose to borrow her pose for the white woman. I wanted to express the relationship between the interracial couple in a way that allowed the viewer to associate her pose with something I would consider to be loving or sexual. The figure that represents myself is the woman on her back in a braced position as she twists and kicks upwards. I wanted to represent the actual beating that took place as a result of my actions. In this composition, Nicole and Christina's positions recreate the act of yelling downward towards the white woman's character, similar to the actual relationship of my trailer to her house. I have one character on her knee while the other character rests her foot on the supporting leg of the crouched woman. This is symbolic for the way we enabled each other and encouraged one another to do bad things. It's important to note that I do not think it is necessary that the viewer be privy to the exactness of my memory or to even know that it is a recollection. It is my wish that viewers employ their own interpretations or simply admire it for being beautiful.



Figure 10. Ashley Maxwell. Detail of *N-Word Lover*.



Figure 11. Ashley Maxwell. *N-Word Lover*

CONCLUSION

White Trash Cherub represents a romanticized depiction of defining and difficult formative years. The elaborate and embellished landscapes I have created present a whimsical interpretation of a youth spent growing up too fast. Barefoot and muddy troublemakers are transformed into flirtatious female figures while beat up cars and double-wides become brightly colored fantastical terrains.

Romanticizing my autobiographical narrative allows my work to become a more accessible vehicle for the discussion of tormenting memories. Although this body of work has its own specific personal meanings, the presentation of these imaginative compositions may allow the viewer to evaluate his or her own memories through an escapist lens. *White Trash Cherub* additionally represents the culmination of my time in Atlanta. It reflects the relationships created, the research completed, and the knowledge accumulated over my three years in the city. The combination of those three ingredients has enabled me to address some of my turbulent but informative juvenile recollections.



Figure 12. Ashley Maxwell. Blood Sisters.



Figure 13. Ashley Maxwell. Dumpster Beat Down.

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